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PAPERS FROM THE DEPARTMENT
OF
PHILOSOPHY.

No. 4.—ROUSSEAU : HIS POSITION IN THE HISTORY
OF PHILOSOPHY.

BY
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[Reprinted from the Philosophical Review, Vol. viii, No. 4, July, 1899.]

MONTREAL, 1899.

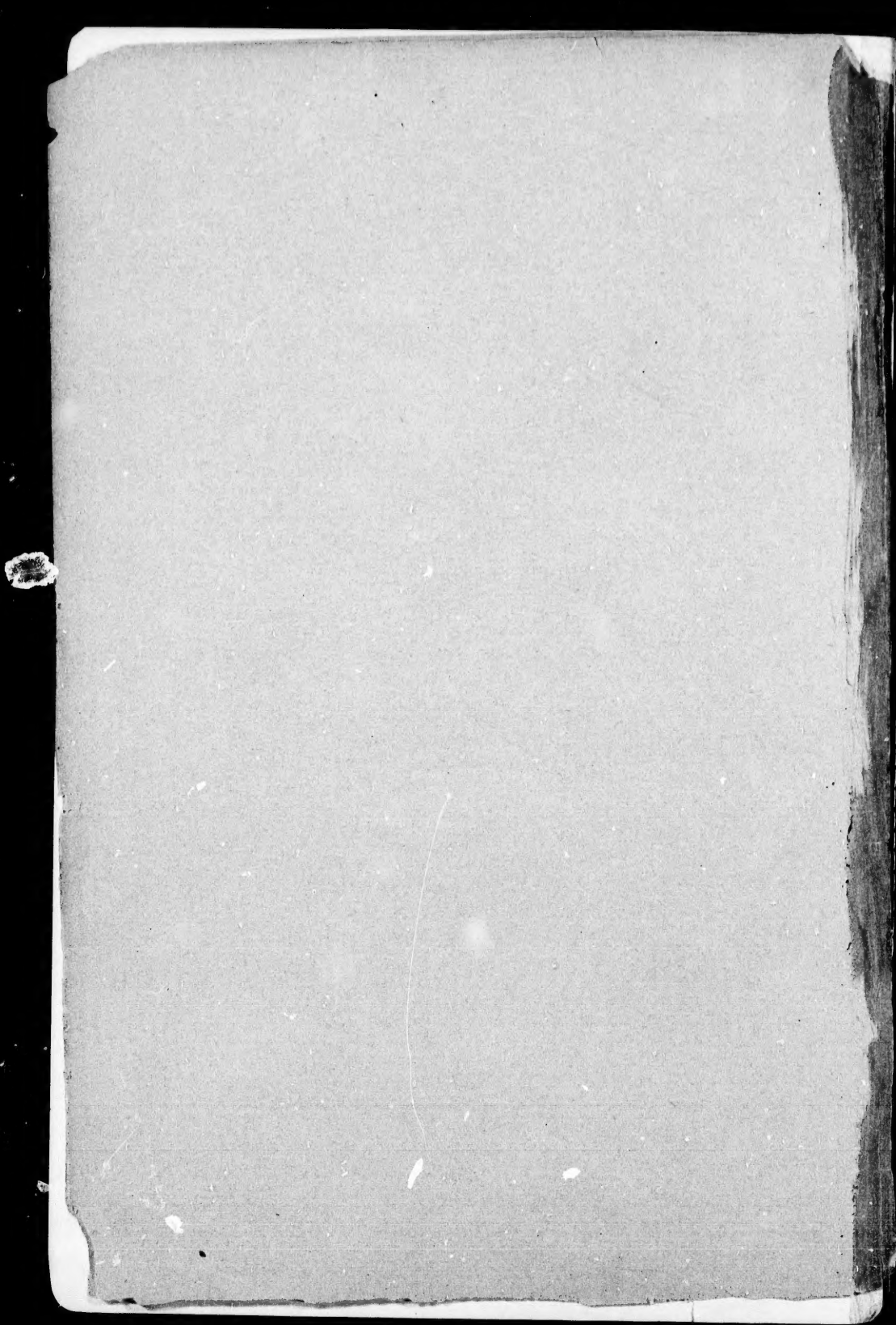


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ROUSSEAU: HIS POSITION IN THE HISTORY
OF PHILOSOPHY.

By J. CLARK MURRAY,
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ROUSSEAU: HIS POSITION IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY.

THE past few months have enriched English literature with two new books on Jean Jacques Rousseau. One is entitled *Rousseau, and Education according to Nature*. It forms a volume in the series of *The Great Educators*, and its author, Mr. Thomas Davidson, is already well known to the readers of that series by his admirable volume on *Aristotle and the Ancient Educational Ideals*. The other book is translated from a French work by M. Texte, Professor of Comparative Literature in the University of Lyon. It is an interesting fruit of the professional labor of the author. It takes Rousseau as the first French representative of the cosmopolitan spirit in literature. Its "whole object," as the Introduction explains, "is to exhibit Rousseau as the man who has done the most to create in the French nation both the taste and the need for the literature of the North." These works, dealing each with a somewhat limited aspect of Rousseau's influence, form thus a striking proof of the manifold interest which continues to be felt in the teaching of the great French writer. The secret of this interest is not difficult to find, though it may be variously interpreted. It is needless to say, that the interest does not arise from any peculiar attractiveness in the personality of Rousseau. Indeed, among the great writers of the world, there are few, the records of whose private lives one would more willingly see obliterated; and in Rousseau's case, fortunately for our purpose, they can be left out of view. Rousseau commands interest still as chief literary representative of one of the greatest movements in the history of the world. That movement offers many phases for study. Here we shall look mainly at its philosophical aspect, noticing the others merely as they throw light upon it.

It is an old criticism of the eighteenth century that its life had become encrusted in extremely artificial forms. At all times, indeed, human life tends to outgrow the modes of thought, of

language, of social action, in which it has to find concrete embodiment; and if they do not yield before the requirements of a new order, they come to

"lie with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life."

At no period, and in no country, perhaps in the whole history of the world, did the higher life of man chafe so impatiently under the restraint of an effete order, as in the France of last century. This antiquated order imposed its irksome regulations upon every sphere of human activity, spiritual and external alike. But social authority especially had extended itself into an infinitude of conventional rules, which narrowed the legitimate sphere of free action, of origination, in the individual, and thereby fettered the evolution of society, of the race. Thus, social regulation in general came to appear, for many thoughtful men of the time, as an artificial restriction, originating in human invention, and having no foundation in any laws which nature herself has imposed upon human life. Aspiration, therefore, took the form of a call to emancipate men from the tyrannous complications, the oppressive inequalities, of this artificial state by returning to the primitive simplicity and freedom, to the fraternal equality, which must have characterized the state of nature.¹ Now, it is evident that the whole significance of this call hinges upon the conception of nature by which it is interpreted—a conception which must interpret the nature of things in general, but the nature of man in particular. It is not necessary here to discuss the various meanings of the word *nature*. A predominant use of the word is to denote that which is essential—that which makes a thing what it is, and without which it would no longer be the same thing. This meaning appears very early in the Greek φύσις, which came to be commonly rendered in Latin by *natura*. Even in the

¹ The wide spread of this aspiration among the reading people of the world could not be more significantly indicated than by the extraordinary popularity of *Robinson Crusoe*. Not only was the novel translated into all the languages of Europe, but, before the century was old, imitations of it in these languages were to be counted by the score. M. Texte has given some account of this popularity (pp. 124-128). It is a fact of further significance in this connection, as readers of *Emile* will remember, that Defoe's story is the only book which Rousseau allows his pupil to read.

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Odyssey, *φάρμακον* is used to denote the peculiar power (*χρόνος*) of the mythical herb *moly*, by which Ulysses was instructed to neutralize the enchantment of Circe. This early use determined its later meaning as a philosophical term. Philosophy in fact became an endeavor to find out the essential element which makes things what they are, and therefore ancient critics commonly described early philosophical treatises by the conventional title *περί φύσεως*.

But this form of philosophical inquiry soon became ambiguous. The ambiguity appeared in the word *ἀρχή*, which is said to have been applied first by Anaxagoras to denote the primitive substance which forms the essential nature of all things. This word, like its Latin equivalent *principium*, and in general all words denoting priority or primacy, may be applied to what is first in rank, as well as to what is first in time. Generally and logically, empiricism considers merely the order in time. On its interpretation, all inquiry into the nature of things becomes simply an attempt to discover their primitive form. In the sciences of human life, the direction of such an inquiry is obvious. Reason, not being, obtrusively at least, a primitive factor of human action, cannot be regarded as an essential constituent of human nature. Even sensibility must be described, from its appearance in the embryo, as being naturally and essentially of a very rudimentary type. In short, the tendency in mental life will be to eliminate all that differentiates the intelligence of man from that of the higher animals, in bodily life, to eliminate all that differentiates his organism from the lowest forms of organic matter.

But philosophical interest gathers specially about the spheres of mental, moral, and social life, both separately and in their relation to one another. This interest is connected with the divergence of views represented by the twofold meaning of *ἀρχή*. The divergence has received a familiar expression in the great conflict which has divided the history of religious speculation in the Christian church, the conflict between the Pelagian and the Augustinian theories of human nature. But, though accentuated in Christian thought, the divergence seems almost to represent an inevitable antinomy of reflection on the subject, and had

therefore made its appearance in Pagan thought long before. Among Pagan thinkers, probably the Pelagian view predominated, especially after the rise of Stoicism. Even the Epicureans are not unfamiliar with this view ; and a mind like Cicero's, with no great power of origination, but with great receptivity for the thoughts of others, seems to vacillate between the two views, drawn alternately, to both. Like a true Pelagian, he contends that, though external prosperity is a matter which God alone can regulate, "*virtutem autem nemo unquam acceptam a deo retulit.*"¹ Yet in the very same treatise he had before fallen into the Augustinian view, that "*nemo vir magnus sine aliquo afflatu divino unquam fuit.*"²

The problem involved in this antinomy is the relation of mind, morals, religion, society, to man's *nature*. The first clear sight of this problem dates from the great intellectual ferment in Athens during the fifty years that followed the victory of Salamis. One of the first results of reflection at that period was the sceptical conclusion of the Sophists with regard to religion and morality. Their attitude on religion denied the power of man to discover anything about the gods ; their ethics maintained that the moral law has its source, not in nature, but merely in the customs and enactments of society. On the other hand, the influence of Socrates seems to have been decidedly opposed to this view, and that is the interpretation put upon his teaching by his greatest disciples, Xenophon and Plato. But he did not carry all his followers with him in this direction. The teaching of Aristippus and the Cyrenaics often outdid that of the Sophists in undermining all natural foundation for the moral and religious life of the world ; and even the Cynics, notwithstanding their exaltation of self-denial, took at times such a narrow view of nature as to degrade into meaningless artificialities even those regulations of animal need, which are most indispensable in the interests of moral refinement.

Socratic teaching, however, had been anticipated in the great

¹ *De Nat. Deor.*, III, 36. Harnack, I see, remarks that these words might serve for a motto to Pelagianism (*Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. III, p. 156, note 2).

² *Ibid.*, II, 66. Seneca, with all his Stoicism, is thoroughly Augustinian. "*Bonus vir sine deo nemo est*" (*Epist.*, IV, 12, 2), is a thought to which he often recurs.

thought of Anaxagoras, that the real *ἀρχή* of all things is reason or intelligence. It has been, among ancient as well as among modern critics, a common objection urged against Anaxagoras, that he failed to carry his own theory to its logical issue—that, while in his general conception of nature, things were referred to a rational purpose, yet many particular things were explained by purely mechanical action. But it may be questioned how far this criticism is just. The attitude of Anaxagoras may have been merely that of philosophical science. For, while philosophy must connect the whole of nature with the purpose of creative intelligence, yet this connection can be indicated only in its general outlines at best, and science would be sure to be led astray, if its prime object were to hunt after the universal thought of the Creator, instead of the particular laws in which that thought is evolved. But, to whatever extent the criticisms of Anaxagoras may be justified, he rendered it impossible to leave reason out of account in the explanation of the universe; and ever since his time the most atheistic materialism has been haunted by the query, whether the processes of nature can find any complete explanation until they are traced to rational purposive action. It was this fact, that seemed to Aristotle to impart such significance to Anaxagoras in the history of speculative thought. In fact, the influence of Anaxagoras is strikingly indicated in the teaching of Aristotle himself. In his well-known theory of causality, Aristotle makes the end to which things are adapted an essential principle of their explanation; so that the nature of a thing, according to him, must be sought, not in the rudimentary state out of which it has grown, but rather in the form which it ultimately assumes, the end which that form subserves.

But the Anaxagorean doctrine found its clearest expression and its fullest application in the philosophy of the Stoics. That doctrine, indeed, may be said to be the central and germinative idea of their whole system. With them, nature and reason came to be identified, and this identification held in macrocosm and microcosm alike. They did not shrink, as Anaxagoras was charged with doing, from the attempt to trace rational action

in the minutest, as well as in the vastest, productions of nature ; and the courage of their convictions is shown in many an alleged purpose of natural products, which, to modern thought seems a very superficial conceit. As they found reason embodied all through the universe at large, they could not but find it particularly in the nature of man. Reason is, in fact, for them the primary and dominant factor of man's nature. On it our very self-hood depends. *Τὸ ἐγὼ λέγομεν κατὰ τοῦτο*, is a statement of Chrysippus which has been preserved.

The divergence of views in reference to human nature, which had thus arisen in Pagan speculation, took a more earnest phase in Christian thought, when it came to be connected with the problems of the religious life. The natural state of man assumed a new interpretation. It came to mean the state into which man falls when he is completely divorced from the divine life. Such a concept of man's nature, it may be urged, is one against which religious thought must always be apt to revolt ; for any devout interpretation of nature obliges us to believe that every creature lives and moves and has being only in God. The concept therefore of man absolutely severed from the life of God must be a mere fiction of abstract speculation, like the later fiction of a state of nature in which man is conceived as absolutely isolated from society. But in the elaboration of such a fictitious abstraction man is necessarily conceived as by nature wholly void of goodness, if not even positively averse to it. All genuine goodness comes to be viewed as an unmerited grace of God to man, and a grace to be won only through the society which He institutes for the purpose. *Extra ecclesiam non esse hominibus salutem*, was a logical conclusion of this dogmatic reasoning ; and we shall see immediately that the later conception of the state of nature led to the denial of the possibility of moral life outside of civil society. The cognate theories form thus a speculative foundation for the most appalling absolutism in church and state.

The Augustinian conception of man's natural state underwent an energetic revival with the rise of modern speculation, especially in the spheres of Christian thought represented in French literature. In the Calvinism of the Huguenots, equally with the

Jansenism of the Catholic Church, the teaching of Augustine remained the dominant influence; and it is important to bear in mind, that it was among the Jansenists of Port Royal, that the philosophy of Descartes found its most powerful expositors.

But a new impulse and a new direction were given to the idea of a state of nature by Hobbes. This great thinker is indeed often misunderstood. His theory of human nature is represented as if it were an extravagant Augustinianism, interpreted in the light of political science rather than in that of dogmatic theology. It is not a pure negation of the Stoical theory, or a rehabilitation of the theory which had been represented by the Sophists and the Cyrenaics. On the contrary, it is rather a remarkable combination of the two views which had been previously opposed to one another. Instead of regarding social institutions and rational laws for the government of human life as purely artificial creations of human convention, he finds a foundation for them in nature. That foundation, moreover, is laid both in the reason and in the sensibility of man. The sufficiency of the foundation may, indeed, be questioned, but it is not without a certain solidity of its kind. Its insufficiency is perhaps peculiarly evident in the enumeration of the emotional impulses upon which social life depends. "The passions that incline men to peace," he says, "are fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary for commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them." This, so far as I have observed, is all that Hobbes has to say on the subject. But it is perhaps significant, that he finds the chief foundation of social union in the intelligent requirements of reason, rather than in the blind instincts of sensibility. Those requirements, demanding social harmony among men, constitute, according to Hobbes, laws of nature; and natural law, at least in his earlier work *De Cive*,² is identified with divine law, and indeed with divine law as expounded in the *Sermon on the Mount*.

* The preceding sketch will enable us to understand more clearly the place of Rousseau in the development of speculation on the problems upon which his influence was most powerful. That influ-

¹ *Leviathan*, p. 116 (Molesworth's ed.).

² Chap. IV. His later translation of the work into English retains this statement.

ence ran mainly along the lines of three ideas : The state of nature ; the state of civil society ; and education.

I. In regard to the state of nature, his hostile critique of Hobbes and Mandeville is apt to create the impression that his view of human nature represents a strong reaction against theirs, and in the direction of the nobler view of the Stoics. But, on more careful examination, his view is seen to be far more completely opposed to the Stoical, and to form in fact a curiously illogical syncretism of irreconcilable doctrines. While his whole philosophy proceeds on the assumption that man is by nature virtuous, and his antagonism to Hobbes and Mandeville arises from the fact that they seem to proceed on an opposite view, he yet describes the natural state of man by characteristics which are incompatible with any intelligent conception of virtue. He recognizes indeed the difficulty of defining this state, as it is one which not only exists no longer, but may never have existed in the past, and may never exist in the future.¹ Still he believes it possible, by analytical study of human nature as it is, to strip off the artificial covering by which its original form is concealed ; and though the rhetoric, which gave him his power, does not always contribute to exactness, yet we can detect two features by which he characterizes the original nature of man.

(1) The first is that man's natural state must be prior to the evolution of reason. This, it need not be said, is the explicit theme of the *Discourse* on the corruption of men by science and art ; it underlies also the reasoning of the *Discourse* on the origin of inequality among men. It may not be difficult to show that this conception of man's natural state is modified, if not even contradicted, in later writings of Rousseau ; yet it remained to the last a dominant idea in his teaching. All that teaching receives a certain unity of aim, when we bear in mind that Rousseau looked for the well-being of man, not from the expansion of man's intelligence, not from the growth of science and art, but by getting rid of all that had been won for life by scientific or artistic intelligence, and by returning to the primitive instincts of an untutored sensibility.

¹ See preface and opening paragraphs of the *Discours sur l'origine*, etc.

It is but fair to Rousseau to plead that all paradox may be viewed as but an exaggeration and misinterpretation of a truth. The truth in this case is a protest, partly against the overestimation of a culture that is purely intellectual, partly against the frequent perversion of intelligence to corrupt the moral life in general, but especially in its uncultured innocence. Rousseau's teaching, in all his leading works, perhaps also in the more deliberate actions of his life, may be interpreted as a protest against both of these errors. His protest, indeed, often runs into an extravagance more paradoxical than the errors against which it was directed. But it is difficult for a fervid writer, like Rousseau, to avoid hyperbole; and the palpable extravagance of an hyperbole often takes from it its misleading influence. Rousseau himself, in fact, seems at times quite aware of his paradoxical exaggeration. "It would be frightful," he says in the second *Discourse*, "to be obliged to praise as a beneficent being the man who first suggested to the dweller on the banks of the Orinoco the use of the boards which he applies to the temples of his children, and which assures to them at least a part of their original imbecility and happiness."¹

(2) A second feature of man's natural state is, that it is absolutely non-social. There is no aspect of this conception of man's nature which brings out so clearly its fictitious character—none which does such rude violence to the most evident facts of observation and experience. The attempt to picture man as by nature a solitary being, simply eliminates all the attributes by which he is most distinctively characterized, and leaves an animal essentially different from man as we know him, not only in mental faculties, but even in bodily organization. Not to dwell on the curious hints about primitive man's physical life, that are scattered throughout the notes to the second *Discourse*, Rousseau is, of course, obliged to wipe out from man's original nature all his social instincts. He does indeed of necessity, recognize the sexual instinct; and, in

¹ M. Saint-Marc Girardin gives point to his own critique, but is scarcely fair to Rousseau, when he introduces this quotation not with the author's own words, "Il serait affreux d'être obligé de louer comme un être bienfaisant," etc., but substitutes for them "Eh bien! quand vous ne penseriez pas, où serait le mal? L'imbécillité n'est pas un si grand malheur, et ce fut un être bienfaisant," etc. (*Rousseau: Sa vie et ses ouvrages*, Vol. I, p. 103).

the *Contrat social* at least, he admits the family to be a society formed by nature. But such concessions only bring out more clearly the repulsively individualistic character of his theory of human nature, for the only natural bond he can see in family life is the dependence of child upon parent. With the cessation of that dependence the bond between them is snapped.¹ The family is thus a purely animal connection; it implies nothing of the distinctive nature of a human society. In like manner, Rousseau ignores, even explicitly denies, any spiritual element in the natural attraction of the sexes for each other; for him, it is simply an animal instinct, not binding to any union beyond the moment of gratification. Was not Nietzsche justified in describing Rousseau's return to nature as a restoration of man "in *impuris naturalibus*"?

II. From this conception of man's natural state, it is a necessary inference that the social state is wholly artificial. The origin of such an artificial condition becomes very difficult for Rousseau to explain. Hobbes, as we have seen, recognized three "passions that incline men to peace," and therefore to social union; and such union, he maintained, is also suggested by the natural dictates of reason. But Rousseau was apparently unable to find any such basis for society in man's nature. He does indeed recognize two human instincts "anterior to reason."² One of these is simply the instinct of self-conservation; but the other, namely, sympathy or pity, is essentially social. It is worth noting, moreover, that Rousseau does not follow Hobbes in his purely egoistic theory of natural feelings. In his view, pity is not merely "grief for the calamity of another, arising from the imagination that the like calamity may befall oneself."³ It is a bit of genuine altruism in human nature. But none the less does it fail to afford any ground for the formation of society. Accordingly, he is driven to that *a priori* method, so common among the social philosophers of last century—the method of 'spinning out of their own consciousness' the history of the origin of so-

¹ *Contrat social*, Liv. I, chap. 2.

² Preface to the second *Discourse*.

³ Hobbes's *Leviathan*, p. 47.

ciety. Rousseau's writings contain typical illustrations of this method. There is, in fact, something delicious in the *naïveté* with which, in the second *Discourse*, he sums up an hypothetical sketch: "Tel fut ou dut être l'origine de la société."

It has often been pointed out that the *Contrat social* mitigates to some extent the harshness of the two discourses, by tracing the corruptions of natural innocence to the artificial influence of life in society. But the later work makes no mitigation of the earlier theory, which holds man to be by nature non-social. Indeed, this theory is obtruded, perhaps more bluntly than ever before, in some parts of the *Contrat social*. Take, for example, the chapter on the function of legislators in the second book. There, it is said, that "he, who ventures to undertake the establishment of a nation, ought to feel himself in the condition of changing, so to speak, human nature, of transforming each individual, who is by himself a perfect and isolated whole, into a part of a larger whole, from which the individual receives in some sort his life and being;" and so on in the same line of thought.

With this view of human nature, Rousseau had no alternative but to trace the foundation of society to an arbitrary convention. In this conclusion, we may recognize specially the influence of Hobbes. The idea of a pact or covenant, indeed, was, in the seventeenth century, a prominent category of thought in the exposition of moral and religious obligations. The celebrated work of Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus* (1677), not only went through numerous editions and translations, but created a vast literature, representing a peculiar system of religious ideas, which has come to be known by the name of Federal Theology. This system seems to have found wide acceptance, especially in the Calvinistic sections of the Protestant church;¹ and it is not impossible that Rousseau in his youth may have been familiar with its exposition by the Swiss preachers. But probably Hobbes was the most potent influence in giving this direction to Rousseau's speculations. Yet it must be remembered that there is an important difference between the two theories. For,

¹ May not the national covenants in England and Scotland have been due partly to the familiarity of the Calvinistic mind with this system of thought?

as we have seen, Hobbes finds a basis for social union both in the natural impulses of passion, and in the natural dictates of reason. The social contract is, therefore, for him simply the formal enactment of natural law—the enactment necessary to give that law practical force. For Rousseau, on the other hand, society is based on a pure convention, which involves a more or less violent transformation of man's original nature.

There is one point, however, in which Rousseau follows Hobbes. For both, the social compact involves a complete surrender of the individual to society, and the tyranny of social rule is none the less exacting on account of the democracy which Rousseau advocates. In fact, it is a tyranny all the more insidious that it puts on a *show* of reasonable self-government. It is the people as a whole who appear simply to constrain the people as individuals. It is forgotten that the people as a whole are, in almost every case, merely a majority—in many cases, merely a majority of the actual voters, overriding not only the minority, but a vaster majority, who either do not care to vote at all, or are disqualified from voting by being women or minors.

III. The absolutism, thus claimed for the State, cannot but appear in strange conflict with Rousseau's theory of education, through which his influence has been, perhaps, more powerful and more beneficial than through any other part of his teaching. The corruption of human life, as we have seen, he traces to the artificial restraint imposed on its natural freedom by social organization, on the one hand, and by intellectual culture, on the other. His theory of education therefore proceeds on the assumption that, if the artificial fetters of society and of civilization are once broken, and the original nature of man allowed free play, it will develop a life of unsophisticated innocence. The logical issue of such an educational theory would be the abrogation of all restrictive government of human life. Anarchism rather than despotism is the political doctrine it involves.

This contradiction points to some defect in the theory of education, which leaves no ground for governmental control of human life. The defect in educational theory arises from defects, which have been already pointed out, in the theory of man's es-

sential nature. This theory, it will be remembered, not only degrades intelligence from the rank of τὸ ἡγεμονικόν—the power which by nature has the right to rule in man, but treats intelligence as if it were an artificial and corrupting growth. As volition is properly intelligent action, will is thus eliminated from man's original nature too. The only element left is, therefore, sensibility, and even this is so narrowed as to exclude all those affections which bind men instinctively to one another, and lead them instinctively to seek their individual good by concerted action. The ideal end of human life is, by such a theory, lowered to that of the crudest hedonism. To dally with agreeable feeling, to avoid everything that might mar such dalliance—that is the Sovereign Good for Rousseau. It is not necessary here to illustrate in detail the pedagogical methods proposed by Rousseau for the attainment of this ideal. The monograph of Mr. Davidson gives an elaborate analysis of these, which will be found extremely helpful for the student of educational theory.

There is one fact which may be noticed in this connection as perhaps likely to bring into clearer view the distinctive defect of Rousseau's teaching. In referring to his influence on contemporary and subsequent speculation, it is common to point to the extraordinary fascination which he exercised over Kant.¹ I call this extraordinary, because it would be difficult to point to two men who exhibit a more striking contrast in personal character, in modes of thought, and in style of literary expression. I shall not attempt to unriddle the mystery of this fascination. But it may be said that the movement inaugurated by Kant was in a certain sense, like Rousseau's, a return to nature. To penetrate beyond the adventitious accretions of human thought, the conventional customs of human action; to reach the original facts of human nature out of which these have grown;—that was the aim of Kant as well as of Rousseau.

But it seems to me simply of infinite significance, that in Kant's mind the vague endeavor to return to nature translated

¹ It seems to have been specially Rousseau's educational theory that interested Kant. It was *Emile*, not, as Mr. Davidson (p. 224) supposes, *La nouvelle Héloïse*, that induced Kant to give up his daily walk. See K. Fischer's *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, Vol. III, p. 220.

itself into a *critique of pure reason*. It cannot be denied that, in ethical theory at least, this led Kant into an extreme Stoicism, which hardly allowed fair play to the emotional nature of man; but in the interpretation of educational problems it implies a radical difference from Rousseau. At the present day, moreover, when science is applying somewhat loosely the lower conception of organization and organic growth to explain the higher phenomena of human life, it is well to be reminded that neither the individual man nor the community of men is merely an organism, and that, therefore, the true evolution of humanity is directed, not by physical force or animal instinct, but by strenuous efforts of free intelligence towards a higher realization of intelligence and freedom.

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